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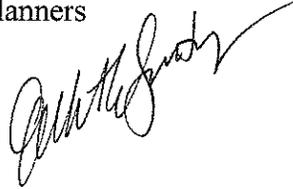
**United States
Department of
Agriculture**

**Office of the
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for Administration**

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TO: Human Pandemic Action Planners

FROM: Gilbert L. Smith, Jr.
Deputy Assistant Secretary
for Administration 

SUBJECT: 2007 Annual Update on the USDA plan for Operating during a Human Pandemic

Almost 18 months ago, the Assistant Secretary for Administration appointed me the Human Pandemic (HP) Operations Officer. At that time, I was confident that we had a good foundation to build on and outlined some goals for the upcoming year. Now, I am providing this update to let you know where we are and where we are going next.

First, I want to thank all the staff members from the Mission Areas and Agencies who have worked hard to make progress in HP planning. In the last 18 months, we have moved the HP programs from the planning and developing stages to an operational stage. We have identified the key missions that the country expects us to support during a pandemic; we have tested our communications plan; and we have finalized the USDA planning guidance.

In the early stages of implementation of the national pandemic influenza strategy, USDA led or co-led most of the activities in preparing for the Federal response to a pandemic. Even though that phase of response planning was animal health oriented, USDA remains among the major participants in the human pandemic phase of the Federal response planning including participation in the Department of Homeland Security interagency draft of the concept of operations plan (CONPLAN) for response to a pandemic, interagency plan for cabinet level pandemic influenza exercises, and participation in the National Principal Federal Official (PFO) team exercises. The PFO team was pre-designated to provide Federal coordination and communication in response to a pandemic.

The operations team has also contributed to the development of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) non-pharmaceutical community mitigation guide; the anti-viral distribution strategy; the State plan development in concert with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the National Governor's Association; and the Federal Stakeholders and Partners Working Group. We have been able to assure that our firefighters are now

considered part of the Nation's first responders. Our food inspectors are part of the critical government infrastructure. Our food and nutrition programs are now included in the community mitigation strategy. Today, USDA has a voice in almost every context of HP planning and exercises.

Additionally, we have tested a software program developed by the Department of the Navy to help identify the status of our workforce during a crisis. This test served as a benchmark for other Departments' testing and has evolved into a core set of requirements for any Department or agency that develops an employee accountability program. We have converted those requirements into a baseline for a new Department-wide timekeeping system. This system will roll out during the next 12 months. USDA has become a leader at the Chief Human Capital Officer Council's Emergency Preparedness Subcommittee as we continue to move our program forward.

So, with all that has been done, what's next? We have reshaped the HP steering committee and now include representatives from the Offices of Homeland Security, Communications, Chief Financial Officer, and Chief Information Officer. We shall begin to move the HP program from planning to operations. We have also moved the day-to day management of the program out of my direct office and into the Operations Center. Shana Love has stepped away from the program, and Ron Niemeyer has stepped in. In 2008, we hope to implement and test the new timekeeping system and our ability to pull reports from that system to determine the status of our workforce. We are looking forward to a significant test of the remote workforce capabilities at USDA, and we will also participate in several exercises as the Homeland Security Council expands its testing of the government-wide program. We will continue to work with CDC and the National Governors Association as State and local plans are developed and with those agencies that partner with industry. We will work with industry to ensure that we have mutual goals and strategies to keep the food supply safe. We will also work towards a plan to keep the continuity of operations plan (COOP) vital during a pandemic. Another key deliverable will be the development of a human resources/personnel guide for supervisors to use during a pandemic or a time of emergency that directly impacts our workforce. We will also be looking at the logistics of operating USDA in the National Capital Region during a pandemic.

In closing, I again want to thank all of those who have helped to move this program forward, specifically Shana Love, who coordinated and championed many causes for human pandemic planning, and Ron Neimeyer who will coordinate our efforts going forward. I realize that many of you who work these issues do it on a collateral duty basis, and I truly appreciate your dedication.